



**Compte-rendu : Competing claims in Work and Family Life by Tanja van der Lippe, Pascale Peters (eds.). Edward Elgar, Cheltenham and Northampton, 2007, 278 pp.**

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Competing claims in Work and Family Life by Tanja van der Lippe, Pascale Peters (eds.).  
Edward Elgar, Cheltenham and Northampton, 2007, 278 pp, ISBN: 9781845427511,  
£59.95, hardback.

Against the background of dramatic changes in the labour market and the evolution of new management principles this book addresses issues that have pushed their way to the forefront of the policy agenda: the pressure of increased demands on time; the rise of the culture of long working hours; and conflicts linked to the management of everyday life. Although a large amount of research-based literature has already been published in this area, all the contributors have provided some compellingly fresh insights into how employees are balancing growing demands from the workplace with the need to “find time” for their own private or family life.

Rationales underpinning trade-offs, negotiations and compromises made by employees at the household level, in particular those facing family responsibilities, are explored in several chapters, in particular the one written by Liana Sayer who sheds light on gender differences in multitasking. On the other hand, it is often mentioned that family-friendly policies – public and/or employer-driven – may alleviate constraints weighing on working parents by providing in-kind and cash benefits which facilitate a better work/life balance. Most authors are nevertheless aware that one's position in the occupational hierarchy (sometimes only measured through the educational level) and patterns of organisational structures also matter.

In his cross-national comparative study (including the US and Japan), Manfred Garhammer argues that time related pressure and increased overwork have led to a deterioration in quality of life, a broad concept combining both subjective and objective indicators. Placing emphasis on full-time employees, his analysis demonstrates that “life satisfaction” is a socio-cultural construction with standards that vary according to one's surroundings. The chapter devoted to the US by Judith Treas and Christin Hilgeman brilliantly explains why longer work hours do not automatically translate into a desire for more family time and that, at odds with Hochschild's thesis, it is somewhat dubious to claim that the workplace has become a refuge

from the family. Their points are relevant and insightful but we should bear in mind that the American institutional and policy context is markedly different from the one found in European countries.

The stimulating Susan Lewis' chapter focuses on the long working hours which are endemic in the chartered accounting profession in Britain. Emphasis is put on the complex bundle of explanatory factors which lead these employees to willingly devote an excessive amount of time to their job. She combines two theoretical approaches: one draws on the time and money exchanges inherent in the 'commodification' of time, the other examines formation of identity within specific occupational contexts and its relationship to 'socially constructed' time. There is evidence however of an emerging counterculture and the arguments put forward by proponents of this new culture are illustrative of the different approach taken by many of the upcoming generation.

As far as possibilities to cope with the conflicting demands of paid and unpaid work are concerned, it has been largely documented that room for manoeuvre is class-bound and gender-related. In line with this perspective, Tanja van der Lippe provides an original analysis by exploring the importance of trustworthiness in the decision-making processes related to household outsourcing.

In all European countries, given the freedom to organise their time at will, most entrepreneurs, executives, professionals and high-level management choose to work long hours which frequently spill over into the evenings and weekends. More specifically, Patricia van Echtelt, Arie Glebbeek, Rudi Wielers and Siegwart Lindenberg put emphasis on the "puzzle" of unpaid overtime in the Netherlands. Against the background of the development of "post-Fordist" organisations (epitomised by knowledge-based organisations) this a very relevant issue to address. In order to explain the "time-greedy nature" of the workplace, they adequately used multi-level techniques. Results are stimulating and counter-intuitive: for instance, that performance-based pay does not stimulate workers to put in extra hours.

Teleworking and telecommuting are the topics of the final two chapters and should draw attention of human resource departments in organisations trying to implement or develop these supposedly "family-friendly" policies for employees.

Seven out of the fifteen chapters are devoted solely to the Netherlands. The UK, the United States, Germany and Flanders are the other research-fields (except in Garhammer's chapter). Regrettably the rationale behind the selection of countries to be represented is neither presented nor entirely justified. It should be kept in mind that the Netherlands is classified, according to Welfare states typologies, as belonging to the cluster of countries qualified as "one and a half breadwinner model" together with Germany and the UK. More specifically, the Netherlands is rather atypical in regards to the patterns of female participation in the labour market: according to Eurostat, in 2006, this country exhibited the highest share in the EU of female employees working part-time (74%) of which 57 percent work less than 20 hours. As demonstrated by Kea Tijdens in her chapter on "Employees' preferences for longer or shorter working hours", this may explain why female employees in this country report rather less friction between preferred and actual working hours than their male counterparts. The Netherlands can therefore be regarded as a less than salient example of the time induced pressures faced in other countries where patterns of female participation in the workforce are very different. In France, for instance, the norm for employed mothers is still to work full-time although part-time jobs have been increasing over the last three decades due to legislation favourable to their development. Moreover, to assess the importance of time constraints and workload at a macro-level, one should also consider the demographic structures: the share of female employees who have children at home and the average number of children per woman must be taken into account when explaining cross-national variations. In France, a country that demonstrates – along with Ireland – the highest fertility rate in the EU, time and spatial constraints are really at stake for women. The ways in which public policies support working parents while promoting gender equality at home and in the workplace are also of great significance and could have been used to shed light on the specificities of the Netherlands in some research fields investigated in this book.

Despite these minor reservations, this book, well-structured and written by highly-qualified contributors, is a valuable contribution to the better understanding of the variables which impact on the interplay between work and private life and successfully provides a medium through which students in sociology and human resource management will be able to chart the shifting boundaries of their respective disciplines.

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